

## STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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### THE MILITARY'S MODERNIZATION CRISIS - MODERNIZATION FUNDING MUST BE INCREASED, WHILE THE DEFENSE BUDGET TUMBLES

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## ABSTRACT

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Over the years, cuts in the defense budget have had a significant impact on the modernization of our military forces. This study explores the nature of the defense cuts, what impact they have had and what changes may be made. It argues that while the defense budget will continue to decline, funding for modernization of our military forces must be increased. The paper connects the requirements of the military with the desires of the American people and the national strategy. It examines how our strategy may change due to budget realities.



The Military's Modernization Crisis - Modernization Funding Must  
Be Increased, While the Defense Budget Tumbles

Through advances in technology and sophisticated weapon systems, the United States has maintained the most lethal military force in the world. Our victory in the Gulf War demonstrated that technology is a significant force multiplier. Booming economies in many nations, especially in the Pacific region, are enabling many countries to modernize their military forces at a rapid rate. But smaller and smaller U.S. defense budgets are not providing sufficient funding to allow the U.S. military to adequately modernize to stay in front of the technological revolution which is occurring throughout the world.

The U.S. defense budget, as outlined in the Annual Report to the President and the Congress which Secretary of Defense Perry submitted in February 1995, continues to decline. Spending on defense continues to fall in FY96 and FY97 and is projected to turn up only slightly in FY98 - but only enough to keep up with the projected rate of inflation.<sup>1</sup> Over the years, cuts in the defense budget have resulted in the downsizing of the military force structure and reduced modernization of the forces. The Clinton Administration is continuing the trend of smaller defense budgets and is not programming sufficient funding to modernize the military forces to win our nation's wars on tomorrow's battlefield. The slow rate at which the U.S. military is re-equipping its troops must be reversed. Funding for modernization must be increased to prevent our military from becoming a hollow force with aging and obsolete equipment.

The defense budget has fallen dramatically since the 1980's, but



the drop in the defense budget is sharpest in the areas of procurement of weapon systems and research and development - modernizing the armed forces. Procurement funding and research, development and acquisition (RDA) funding have dropped by more than 60 percent in the last 10 years.<sup>2,3</sup>

Increased spending on procurement of weapon systems from the late 1970's through the mid 1980's resulted in substantial modernization throughout the armed forces. The Army upgraded its fighting forces with new Abrams tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles and Apache attack helicopters. The Navy expanded its fleet from 12 to 15 aircraft carriers and from 479 to 574 ships. And the Air Force completed modernizing its tactical fighter fleet with F-15, F-16, A-10 and F-117 aircraft. Considerable investments were also made in intelligence and communications systems. Most of these systems had been procured and introduced into the force structure by 1991 and were employed in Desert Storm, contributing immeasurably to the rapid and decisive U.S. victory.<sup>4</sup>

But fewer new systems were included in the reduced procurement budgets of the late 1980's and early 1990's, and this has resulted in a sharp decrease in the number of new systems being introduced into the force structure in the last few years. This trend will continue in the future until the precipitous drop in procurement funding (from \$126B in 1985 to only \$39B in 1996) is reversed.<sup>5</sup>

The military's inventory of equipment is aging and the rate at which new weapons systems are being procured is in most cases well below the replacement rate. Today's military capability is a product of the increased defense investments made from the late 1970's to the mid 1980's,



but according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), capabilities procured during that timeframe will reach their "half-life" (the date when those systems must be replaced to prevent them from becoming obsolete) shortly after the year 2000.<sup>6</sup> For example, the average age of the Army tank will increase from 11 years in FY99 to 22 years in FY11 (the half-life is 15 years). Even worse, the average age of Air Force airlift aircraft will be 27 years in FY99 and 35 years in FY11 (the half-life is 22 years).<sup>7</sup> Modernization of the military force must begin by the turn of the century (the same time that Congress and the President will be putting increased pressure on the defense budget to eliminate the deficit). If modernization funding is not increased immediately, our military force may become obsolete by the first decade of the 21st century.

The Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS) also projects that in about 10 years, the services will be facing widespread obsolescence of military equipment - most notably attack helicopters, bombers, airlift aircraft and submarines.<sup>8</sup> This trend will worsen if the services are forced to delay or cancel major weapons systems due to lack of procurement funding as recent guidance from the Office of the Secretary of Defense has suggested. For example, delaying or cancelling procurement of the Comanche armed reconnaissance helicopter would lead to a serious aging of the helicopter fleet in the coming decade.<sup>9</sup> (The average age of recon and attack helicopters will be 22 years in FY99 while the half-life is 15 years).<sup>10</sup>

Desperate funding shortages in service modernization accounts have led to concerns among the Army leadership that the Army of the next



century will lack the ability to overwhelm potential enemies as it did during the Gulf War. The Army leadership is now analyzing procurement plans to determine which programs will have to be eliminated if procurement funding does not increase. "The Army has to make some very tough calls about what are the most critical weapon systems needed in the future," stated GEN Ronald Griffith, the Army's Vice Chief of Staff.<sup>11</sup> Money saved by cutting programs would be spent on the most critical programs such as the Abrams tank, Bradley fighting vehicles, the future Comanche RAH-66 scout helicopter and the next-generation Crusader artillery system. No decisions have been made as to which systems would be cut, but cuts may ground Cobra helicopters and Combat Engineer vehicles.<sup>12</sup>

The Army's research, development and acquisition (RDA) budget has dropped steadily from almost \$30B in 1985 to \$12.4B in 1995. The Army's 1996 RDA budget is projected to fall to only \$10.7B and expected to drop further in 1997 and 1998.<sup>13</sup> New systems have to be introduced as current systems become obsolete. But we are not concentrating on replacing aging equipment with new technologically advanced systems while our R&D budgets are declining. The R&D that is being conducted consists mainly of modifications and upgrades to existing aging systems. We are mortgaging our future and do not have a true long-term modernization strategy.

The slow rate at which the military is modernizing its forces is impacting fighting effectiveness and could result in thousands of casualties according to senior Army generals. BG Johnny Riggs, Director of Requirements for the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans stated that while there are no studies that suggest a time period when the



U.S. Army would lose a war, current modernization shortfalls will make it difficult for the future force to meet the national defense strategy. The U.S. Army is expected to remain dominant against any prospective enemy through 2000, but Army officials say limited modernization funds make conducting future wars with minimum casualties difficult. According to BG Riggs, "If the next war is in Southwest Asia in 2001 with the five Army divisions outlined in the Pentagon's Bottom Up Review, U.S. casualties will number at least 11,000 unless the Army's weapons budget improves between now and then."<sup>14</sup>

The need to invest significantly more than the \$39 billion programmed for buying new equipment in 1996 is detailed in the Chairman's Program Assessment (CPA).<sup>15</sup> U.S. defense procurement spending must reach \$65 billion annually or the nations armed forces will be unable to meet the national security strategy of fighting two regional conflicts. The CPA recommends savings by eliminating some systems (e.g. additional B-2 stealth bombers and retiring SR-71 reconnaissance aircraft) and funding others (e.g. the Army's Family of Medium Tactical Vehicles, the Joint Advanced Strike Technology (JAST) program and Tomahawk cruise missiles for all submarines), but there is little reason to believe that defense spending will increase.

The public supported increases in defense spending when they felt their security was threatened. They did so during World War II, the Korean War, the War in Vietnam, the early Reagan years and the Gulf War. The American public has always supported increased defense spending during wartime (WWII, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and Desert Storm), but President Reagan used strong political leadership to persuade the public



to support a defense buildup during peacetime. He did this by convincing the American public that their security was threatened (the Iranian hostage crisis) and their military defense at that time was incapable of protecting them (the failed hostage rescue mission). But even Reagan was able to get less than a 2% jump in defense growth vs GDP before it flattened out after about 5 years of real growth. And President Bush did not get an increase in defense spending based upon the Gulf War. The public supported no more than a one-year halt in the defense spending decline before the trend continued down. In general, the American public appears to have grown less supportive of defense spending over the last 50 years. Defense spending as a percentage of GDP has fallen from 12% in 1953 to less than 4% in 1996.<sup>16</sup> And by the year 2000, defense spending is projected to fall to only 3.0% of GDP.<sup>17</sup>

To most Americans, the collapse of the Soviet Union has eliminated the threat to the United States. And instead of supporting defense spending, the public now appears to be supporting social programs such as Medicare and Medicaid, which are projected to climb over 60% as a function of GDP in the next 10 years (from 3.8% to 6%) while defense spending declines further.<sup>18</sup>

A poll published in the Army Times in August 1995 indicates that the public is not going to rescue the Department of Defense from deeper cuts. The public seems to be in tune with the administration's continued de-emphasis of defense. The American public is saying cut the defense budget, not social programs. And the public does not think there is merit in developing a force structure based upon a two-war strategy. The American public also believes the United States should not be the world's



"policeman" and should intervene abroad only in coalitions with allies or with the United Nations. The results of this poll clearly indicate that the public thinks defense spending should be cut further. In 1980, less than 15% of Americans thought the government was spending too much on defense and over 50% thought too little was being spent. At the current time, over 40% think too much is being spent on defense.<sup>19</sup>

During the poll, respondents were asked where the federal budget should be cut. 64% said cut defense, only 35% said cut Medicare only 28% said social security should be reduced. Also, 48% said a two-war strategy was unrealistic and unnecessary, and 61% said it's unlikely the United States would be involved in two wars at the same time.<sup>20</sup>

An isolationist trend seems to be developing. 59% of Americans would intervene in world trouble spots only if there was cost sharing with our allies and the United Nations. 90% said allies should pay and participate, and 53% said the United States should base its defense budget on the assumption that the United States should intervene abroad only with the United Nations or groups of allies. 69% said the United Nations should take the lead against aggression abroad. Only 28% said the United States should take the lead. And when asked if the United States should take the lead if the United Nations fails to act, only 37% said yes, 29% said the United States should stay out of any conflict entirely and 31% said we should wait for others to act.<sup>21</sup>

A more recent defense spending poll conducted by the Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland and released in January 1996 confirms that Americans support further cuts in defense spending. The median poll respondent said defense spending should be cut



10 percent and a strong majority support a cut of up to 20 percent if President Clinton and Congress agree it is necessary to balance the federal budget.<sup>22</sup>

The basis for the defense spend plan is the Bottom Up Review (BUR) which was completed in September 1993 and reflected in last years Future Years Defense Plan (FYDP) for 1995-2000. The Bottom Up Review called for a FY 96 force structure consisting of 10 active Army divisions, an Air Force consisting of 13 active fighter wings, a Navy with 11 active aircraft carriers, 3 active Marine divisions and additional reserve augmentation across the services. While the Navy's force structure is based upon presence requirements, the defense spend plan is theoretically based on a military force capable of conducting two near simultaneous Major Regional Conflicts (MRC). However, over a year ago, Secretary of Defense Perry and the GAO reported that the BUR force structure and projected funding would not support two MRCs.<sup>23</sup>

It is apparent that pressure to balance the federal budget will force continued cuts in the defense budget, but cuts cannot continue to come from our modernization account and totally eliminate our ability to modernize our forces. Since it is now obvious that defense budgets will continue to decline, senior U.S. military leaders are beginning to conduct hardware vs personnel battles and discuss trade-offs between force structure and modernization. It is now critical that our DoD and military leaders develop a realistic long-term strategy to increase modernization funding to modernize our military forces before we become a hollow force with obsolete equipment, rendering our forces ineffective on the battlefield. A combination of force structure cuts and more



cost-effective business practices (the military and DoD becoming more efficient) will be required to fund the required long-term modernization strategy.

We must find new and more cost-effective ways of doing business to preserve as much of our force structure as possible, while programming funds to buy the modern weapons and equipment for future wars. As we saw in Desert Storm, our armed forces cannot win a war without forces on the ground. But, at the same time, the services must provide the warfighters the modern weapons they need to overwhelm an adversary on the battlefield. We must begin to run the military like a business. We must take the critical and courageous steps necessary to transform the world's largest business into a more efficient organization to provide savings which can be used for modernization of our armed forces while minimizing the reduction in force structure. There are both short term and long term initiatives which must be explored.

Some force structure cuts can be made by designing new weapons systems with the requirement for fewer personnel to operate and maintain them. The Navy is producing new destroyers with the firepower of older cruisers while reducing personnel requirements by over 200 sailors per ship. Similarly the Air Force's B-2 stealth bomber, with its two man crew, cuts personnel requirements in half and significantly reduces the fighter support package due to its increased performance.<sup>24</sup>

More money can be saved by making vertical cuts as opposed to percentage cuts across the board. By eliminating single role systems (e.g. certain aircraft, vehicles or ships), costs can be reduced by more than just the elimination of hardware and operations and maintenance (O&M)



costs. The Navy developed a plan in 1989 to cut nearly one half of its ships over a ten year period to provide additional funding for research, development and procurement. The Navy is projected to decommission about 250 ships from its inventory, from a high of nearly 600 in 1989 to 350 in 1999.<sup>25</sup> The Navy determined that by cutting complete classes of ships, not only could the costs for the manpower and ship O&M be eliminated, but all the support costs (eg. contracts, contractors, spare parts) could be eliminated as well. Funds saved are being used to recapitalize the Navy.

We must capitalize on our joint warfighting ability. Since the CINC's warfighting operation is a joint effort at echelons above corps (EAC), it may be possible for EAC functions such as logistics, communications, and intelligence to be combined into one joint executive agency, consolidating all the service unique applications and producing a more efficient and cost-effective operation.

Not only must we fight jointly in the future, we must procure jointly in the future. The Joint Requirements Oversight Council (JROC) will consolidate overlapping and redundant, service-unique, stove-pipe systems, saving billions of dollars, producing more cost-effective systems meeting joint requirements. For example, the many service-unique theatre ballistic defense systems are being consolidated through the JROC process, potentially yielding tens of billions of dollars which can be invested in other critically needed future weapons systems.

In the short term, there are many immediate solutions which can be implemented which can provide savings which can be used to fund investments in future systems. Many military support functions should be privatized. According to ADM Owens, Vice Chairman of the Joint



Chiefs of Staff, the military could save billions of dollars a year by turning the day-to-day operations of its bases over to private contractors. These savings could then be used to buy new weapons and modern equipment. By hiring civilian companies to perform duties from fixing plumbing and mowing lawns to issuing paychecks and processing paperwork, costs for such services could be cut by a third.<sup>26</sup> The money could then be used for weapons modernization.

But new and more cost-effective ways of doing business alone will not reconcile our inability to fund the BUR force. The defense budget will not adequately support the BUR force. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) estimates the cost of fully supporting the BUR force over the long term will require spending about 4.5% of GDP on defense.<sup>27</sup> However, current defense funding projections outline a defense budget which is 3.6% of GDP this year and already projected to fall to 3.0% of GDP by the year 2000.<sup>28</sup> This means that while there is a shortfall in funding for the BUR force of 0.9% of GDP in FY 96 - resulting in a shortfall in funding this year of over \$65 billion, there will be a shortfall of 1.5% of GDP in the year 2000 - resulting in a shortfall of approximately \$135 billion. Between now and the year 2000, the nation's military will have been underfunded by a total of roughly \$500 billion dollars compared to constant level of defense spending at 4.5% of GDP.

To adequately support and modernize a military force with a defense budget of no more than 3.0% of GDP, substantial reductions in the size of the BUR force - on the order of at least 15-20 percent are inevitable according to the CSIS.<sup>29</sup> The total cost of fully supporting and modernizing a 1.45 million man BUR force over the next twenty years



(from 1996 to 2015) is estimated by the CSIS to cost \$3.4 trillion. The CSIS projects that at a funding level capped at 3% of GDP, only 42% of the military forces hardware can be modernized if the BUR force structure of 1.45 million men is retained.<sup>30</sup> Defense budgets funded at less than 4.5% of GDP require reductions in the BUR force structure, but the resulting smaller force will be a much more modern force than the BUR force that we are no longer able to modernize.

There is widespread evidence that we are not able to adequately modernize our armed forces even at the current rate of 3.6% of GDP for FY 96. The January 1996 cancellation of Army's Armored Gun System on the eve of production is just the most recent example of modernization programs that are being sacrificed by the cash-strapped services which are making long-term modernization sacrifices to free up cash for short-term personnel costs. Another example of how cash-strapped the services are also occurred in January 1996 when the Pentagon asked Congress to provide \$1.9 billion for the peacekeeping mission in Bosnia by shifting funds in the defense budget. Part of the money (\$991 million) is available because inflation has been lower than projected. But the remaining funding would be obtained by taking money out of modernization and intelligence programs. \$305.4 million would be diverted from a variety of weapons programs that the Clinton administration regards as low priority programs such as the Army's Kiowa Warrior scout helicopter, the Navy's F-18 C and D model fighters and CH-53 Superstallion helicopters, the Marine's AV-8B attack fighters, and the Air Force's F-16, F-15 E and B-2 aircraft. The remaining \$620 million would be diverted from the National Reconnaissance Office.<sup>31</sup>



Even estimates by the General Accounting Office project the shortfall between the programmed defense budgets and funds necessary to support the BUR force in excess of \$150 billion over the next 5 years.<sup>32</sup> The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) analysis of the military's acquisition programs indicates continued underfunding to the year 2010.<sup>33</sup> According to the CBO, the cost of the Clinton administration's planned defense budget could more than double, producing a \$200 billion deficit in the defense budget if cost growth occurs in new weapons systems.

There are three possible strategies which can be pursued with respect to long-term modernization and force structure. We can do nothing and maintain what will become a large unmodernized force which will be technologically inferior to a future adversary; we can make painful force structure cuts to pay for a comprehensive modernization program for the total force; or we can pursue a layered readiness approach, modernizing only higher priority units for war (MRCs) while maintaining other units at a lower state of readiness and modernization to support lesser regional contingencies (LRCs) such as peacekeeping and humanitarian operations.

Any one of the three alternative modernization/force structure strategies will require a change to the U.S. national military strategy and national security strategy. A large unmodernized force will not have the capability to effectively wage one, much less two, MRC, but neither will a smaller more modern military force have the manpower to sustain two near simultaneous MRCs. Therefore the national military strategy of a two near simultaneous MRC capability must be changed. First because it will not be possible in the future and secondly because there may be a better way to achieve the national security strategy of the United States.



Our national security strategy of engagement and enlargement dictates that we be actively involved in providing stability and promoting democracy throughout the world. However, a national military strategy of fighting two major regional conflicts is a reactive rather than proactive strategy. Our national military strategy should instead concentrate equally on supporting lesser regional contingencies to prevent them from developing into major regional conflicts. Operations such as Bosnia, Haiti and Somalia are current examples of such a proactive national military strategy supporting the national security strategy - promoting stability and democracy throughout the world.

Finally, the execution of our national security strategy must be modified to use the other elements of national power to balance any decrease in military power. With a smaller and/or partially modernized military force it will not always be possible for our military force to act unilaterally throughout the world. Therefore the impact of our military element of national power will be decreased. It must be balanced with an increase in the other elements of national power to effectively execute our national security strategy of engagement and enlargement. Our political element must be used to forge defensive and mutual assistance agreements with other countries so they will contribute forces to joint and combined operations throughout the world to offset a decrease in the size of the U.S. military force structure. And our economic element of national power must become actively involved in providing stability throughout the world. Investments by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is critical to the economic and political stability of developing countries. The success of political and market reforms will depend more



on trade than aid.

The U.S. defense budget is continuing to decline while year after year it is projected to increase in the outyears. The defense budget will not increase unless or until our security appears threatened. Therefore modernization, required to maintain an effective military force, will require force structure changes and a refinement of the national military strategy which in turn must be balanced with an increased emphasis on the other elements of national power. However, this process is reactive and should instead be looked at in terms of ends, ways and means.

The national security strategy of the United States is a strategy of engagement and enlargement to provide democracy and stability throughout the world (the ends). There are three elements of national power: economic, political and military (the ways) to accomplish the ends. The U.S. government is transforming the method of utilizing the military element from reacting to crises (eg. MRCs) to preventing crises (eg. supporting LRCs such as peacekeeping and humanitarian operations). The government must now rely more heavily on the political element of national power to build alliances and multilateral agreements to ensure multilateral participation in any major regional conflict around the world. It must also rely more heavily on NGOs to provide stability throughout the world. And finally the military force (one of the means) must be tailored to the way in which our military power is to be projected. A modern, albeit smaller, lethal military force will be required to participate in major regional conflicts with our partners throughout the world while a less modernized and less capable contingent may be capable of supporting lesser regional contingencies.



A realistic long-range modernization and readiness strategy which retains our nation's technical superiority must be developed within the funding constraints of a balanced budget. The American public will not support increases to the defense budget, but the military must significantly increase its spending on weapons, ships, planes, and other systems to replace those that are wearing out, to maintain technical superiority on the battlefield. We must run our military business more efficiently. And by better managing our defense budget, savings can be invested in new warfighting systems. But to realistically bring our modernization program and force structure in line with budget realities, force structure cuts will be required. New and more cost-effective ways of doing business alone will not reconcile our inability to fund the BUR force. But the smaller force, leveraged with 21st century technology, will be a much more capable force than the BUR force that we are no longer able to modernize.

The decision to focus on the force of tomorrow and our future effectiveness will be difficult, but the allocation of our scarce defense resources will be felt by the future armed forces for decades to come, just as investments made in the late 1970's and early 1980's produced the extremely lethal armed force which produced the rapid and decisive Gulf War Victory.



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